



# der *Hitler*



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## Adolf Hitler - speech to the Reichstag - Berlin, May 17, 1933



*Berlin, May 17, 1933*

Deputies, Ladies and Gentlemen of the German Reichstag! In the name of the Reich Government I have asked the Reichstag President to convene the Reichstag so that I may take a stand before this forum on the questions which today affect not only our Volk but the entire world.

The problems which you know so well are of such great significance that not only political pacification, but the economic salvation of all are contingent upon finding a satisfactory solution.

When I express the desire on behalf of the German Government that the handling of these problems be totally removed from the sphere of passion, I do this not least of all in the realization dominating us all, namely that the crisis of our time owes its deepest origin alone to those passions which dimmed the insight and intelligence of the nations after the War.

For all of the problems causing today's unrest lie anchored in the deficiencies of the Peace Treaty, which was unable to provide a judicious, clear and reasonable solution for the most important and most decisive questions of the time for all ages to come. Neither the national problems nor the economic - not to mention the legal-problems and demands of the peoples were solved by virtue of this Treaty in a manner which would allow them to withstand the criticism of reason for all time. Thus it is understandable that the idea of a revision is not only an integral part of the lasting side effects of



the consequences of this Treaty; indeed, the necessity of revision was foreseen by its authors and hence given a legal foundation in the Treaty itself.

When I deal briefly here with the problems this Treaty should have solved, I am doing so because the failure in these areas inevitably led to the subsequent situations under which the political and economic relations between nations have been suffering since then.

The political problems are as follows: in the course of many centuries, the European nations and their borders evolved from concepts which were based exclusively upon the idea of a political State as such. With the triumphant assertion of the national idea and the principle of nationalities in the course of the past century, the seeds of numerous conflicts were sown as a result of the failure of States which had arisen under different circumstances to take these new ideas and ideals into account. At the end of the Great War, there could have been no greater task for a real peace conference than to undertake, in the clear recognition of this fact, a territorial and political reorganization of the European States which would do justice to this principle to the greatest possible degree.

The more closely the borders between peoples coincided with the borders between States, the more this would have done away with a whole series of future potential conflicts. In fact, this territorial reorganization of Europe, taking into account the actual borders between peoples, would have constituted the solution in history which, with a view to the future, might have allowed both victors and vanquished to perceive that the blood sacrifices of the Great War were perhaps not completely in vain, for they might have served the world as the foundations for a real peace.

As it was, solutions were chosen-partly due to ignorance, partly to passion and hatred-which contained the perpetual seed of fresh conflicts in their very lack of logic and fairness.

The economic problems the conference was to have solved are as follows: The present economic situation in Europe is characterized by the overpopulation of the European West and, in the land comprising this territory, by the dearth of certain raw materials which are indispensable for the customary standard of living in these very areas with their ancient culture. Had one wished to bring about a certain pacification of Europe for the humanly foreseeable future, it would have been necessary-instead of relying upon the unproductive and dangerous concepts of penance, punishment, reparation, etc.-to rely upon and take into account the deep realization that lack of means of existence has always been a source of conflict between peoples. Instead of preaching the precepts of destruction, one would have had to initiate a reorganization of the international, political and economic relations which would have done justice to the vital needs of each individual people to the fullest possible extent.

It is unwise to deprive a people of the economic resources necessary for its existence without taking the fact into consideration that the population dependent upon them must of necessity continue to live in this territory. It is absurd to believe that one is performing a useful service to other peoples by economically destroying a people numbering 65 million. Peoples who would proceed in such a manner would very soon, under the laws of nature linking cause and effect, come to experience that they would be subjected to the same catastrophe which they intended to impose upon another people. One day the concept of reparations and their enforcement will become a classic example in the history of nations of the extent to which disregard for international welfare can be damaging to all.



As it was, reparation politics could be financed only by German exports.

The export industry of the creditor states was made to suffer to the same extent to which Germany, because of the reparations, was regarded as a sort of international export company. Hence the economic advantages of the reparation payments could bear no relation to the damage caused to the individual economies by these reparations.

The attempt to avoid this development by compensating for the limits placed on German exports by means of granting loans to make the payments possible lacked circumspection and was ultimately wrong. For the conversion of political debts to private obligations led to an interest requirement, the fulfilment of which unavoidably produced the same results. However, the worst of the matter was that the development of domestic economic life was artificially checked and destroyed. Competition in the world markets by a constant undercutting of prices led to an overintensification of rationalizing measures in the economy.

The millions of our unemployed constitute the final consequence of this development. Were one inclined to limit the reparation obligations to deliveries of goods, this would result in no less substantial damage to the domestic production of the peoples profiting from them. This is because deliveries of goods in the magnitude in question are not conceivable without acute danger to the continued existence of the peoples' own production.

The Treaty of Versailles is to blame for having inaugurated a period in which the mathematical genius of finance is bringing about the demise of economic reason.

Germany has fulfilled these obligations imposed upon it, in spite of their inherent lack of reason and the foreseeable consequences, so faithfully as to be virtually suicidal.

The international economic crisis is the indisputable proof of the correctness of this statement.

The plan of restoring a general international sense of justice was no less destroyed by the Treaty.

In order to justify all of the measures of this edict, Germany had to be branded as the guilty party. This is a procedure which is, however, just as simple as it is impossible. This would mean that in future, the vanquished will always bear the blame for conflicts, for the victor will always be in a position to simply establish this as a fact.

This procedure therefore assumed a terrible significance because, at the same time, it served as a reason for transforming the relative strength existing at the end of this War to a lasting legal status. The concepts of victor and vanquished were hence made to constitute the foundations of a new international legal and social order.

The degradation of a great people to a second-rate, second-class nation was proclaimed in the same breath with which a League of Nations was called into being.

This treatment of Germany could not lead to a pacification of the world. The disarmament and defencelessness of the vanquished which was considered necessary-an unheard of procedure in the history of the European nations-was even less suited to diminish the general dangers and conflicts;

rather, it led to a state of affairs consisting of those perpetual threats, demands and sanctions which threaten to become, by virtue of the continual unrest and insecurity they cause, the death of the entire economy. If, in the lives of peoples, every consideration of the risks involved in certain actions is omitted, unreason will all too easily triumph over reason. At any rate, until now the League of Nations has been incapable of providing appreciable assistance to the weak and unarmed on such occasions. Treaties which are concluded for the pacification of the lives of peoples in relation to one another have any real meaning only when they are based upon a genuine and honest equality of rights for all. And this is the main reason for the turmoil which has dominated the world for years.

Finding a reasonable and lasting solution to the problems existing today lies in the interests of all. No new European war would be capable of bringing about anything better in place of the unsatisfactory conditions of the present.

On the contrary: the use of any type of violence in Europe could not serve to create a more favourable political and economic situation than exists today.

Even if a fresh violent European solution were a decisive factor in solving the problems, the final result would be an increase in the disturbance to the balance of power in Europe, and therefore, one way or another, the seed of further conflicts and complications would be sown.

New wars, new uncertainty, and a new economic crisis would be the consequences. The outbreak of such madness without end would, however, lead to the collapse of today's social and political order. A Europe sinking into Communist chaos would give rise to a crisis of unforeseeable proportions and unpredictable length.

It is the earnest desire of the National Government of the German Reich to prevent such an unpeaceful development by means of its honest and active cooperation.

This is also the real meaning behind the radical change which has taken place in Germany. The three factors which dominate our revolution do not contradict the interests of the rest of the world in any way.

First: preventing the impending Communist subversion and constructing a *Volksstaat* uniting the various interests of the classes and ranks, and maintaining the concept of personal property as the foundation of our culture. Second: solving the most pressing social problems by leading the army of millions of our pitiful unemployed back to production. Third: restoring a stable and authoritarian leadership of the State, supported by the confidence and will of the nation which will finally again make of this great Volk a legitimate partner to the rest of the world.

Speaking now, conscious of being a German National Socialist, I would like to proclaim on behalf of the National Government and the entire national uprising that, above all, we in this young Germany are filled with the deepest understanding of the same feelings and convictions and the justified demands of the other nations to live. The generation of this young Germany, which until now has come in its lifetime to know only the want, misery and distress of its own Volk, has suffered too dearly from this madness to be capable of contemplating subjecting others to more of the same.



In that we are devoted to our own identity as a Volk in boundless love and faith, we also respect the national rights of other peoples on the basis of a common conviction and desire from the very bottom of our hearts to live with them in peace and friendship.

Thus the concept of Germanization is alien to us. The mentality of the past century, on the basis of which it was believed possible to make Germans of Poles and Frenchmen, is foreign to us, just as we passionately reject any respective attempt in the opposite direction. We view the European nations as a given fact. The French, the Poles, etc. are our neighbours, and we know that no historically conceivable event can change this reality.

It would have been fortunate for the world had these realities been given due consideration in respect to Germany in the Treaty of Versailles. For the object of a genuinely lasting treaty should not be to cut open fresh wounds or keep existing ones open, but rather to close and heal the wounds. A judicious handling of the problems could easily have arrived at a solution in the East which would have accommodated both the understandable claims of Poland as well as the natural rights of Germany. The Treaty of Versailles failed to provide this solution. In spite of this, no German Government will of its own accord violate an agreement which cannot be eliminated without being replaced by a better one.

Yet this recognition of the legal character of such a treaty can be merely a general one. Not only the victor, but the vanquished as well has claim to the rights accorded it therein. But the right to demand a revision of the Treaty lies anchored in the Treaty itself. The German Government wishes to base the reasons for and the extent of its claims on nothing other than the present results of past experiences and the incontestable consequences of critical and logical reasoning. The experiences of the last fourteen years are both politically and economically unequivocal.

The misery of the peoples was not alleviated; instead, it increased. The deepest root of this misery lies, however, in the division of the world into victor and vanquished as the intended permanent basis for all treaties and any future order. The worst effects of this order are expressed in the forced defencelessness of one nation in the face of an exaggerated armament on the part of the others.

The reasons why Germany has been staunchly demanding universal disarmament for years are as follows: First of all, the demand for equality of rights expressed in actual facts is a demand of morality, right and reason; a demand which was acknowledged in the Treaty itself and the fulfilment of which was indissolubly tied to the demand for German disarmament as a starting point for world disarmament.

Secondly, because conversely the degradation of a great Volk cannot be maintained in history forever but must of necessity one day come to an end.

How long is it believed to be possible to impose such an injustice upon a great nation? What is the advantage of the moment worth in comparison to the ongoing developments of centuries? The German Volk will continue to exist, just as the French and, as we have learned from historical evolution, the Polish have done. What significance and what value can the successful short-term oppression of a people of 65 million have in comparison to the force of these incontrovertible facts? No State can have a greater understanding of the newly established young European national states



than the Germany of the National Revolution which has arisen from the same will. It wants nothing for itself which it is not prepared to accord to others.

When Germany today lodges the demand for genuine equality of rights in respect to the disarmament of the other nations, it has a moral right to do so given its own fulfillment of the treaties. For Germany did disarm, and Germany performed this disarmament under the strictest international control. Six million rifles and carbines were handed over or destroyed; the German Volk was forced to destroy or surrender 130,000 machine guns, huge amounts of machine gun barrels, 91,000 pieces of artillery, 38.75 million shells, and an enormous supply of other weapons and munitions.

The Rhineland was demilitarized, the German fortresses were pulled down, our ships surrendered, the aircraft destroyed, our military system was abandoned, and thus the training of reserves prevented. Even the most needed weapons of defence were denied us.

If, in the face of these indisputable facts, anyone should come forward today, citing truly pitiful excuses and pretexts and claiming that Germany did not comply with the Treaty and had even rearmed, I must reject this view at this time for being as untrue as it is unfair.

It is equally incorrect to claim that Germany has not complied with the provisions of the Treaty in respect to personnel. The allegation that the SA and the SS of the National Socialist Party are connected in any way with the Reichswehr in the sense that they represent formations with military training or army reserves is untrue! A single example serves to illustrate the irresponsible thoughtlessness with which such allegations are made: last year in Brünn, members of the National Socialist Party in Czechoslovakia were put to trial. Sworn experts of the Czech Army claimed that the defendants maintained connections to the National Socialist Party in Germany, were dependent upon it and thus, as members of a popular sports club (*Volkssportverein*), were to be equated with members of the SA and SS in Germany which constituted a reserve army trained and organized by the Reichswehr.

At the same time, however, the SA and SS—just as the National Socialist Party itself—not only had no connection with the Reichswehr whatsoever: on the contrary, they were regarded as organizations hostile to the State and persecuted, banned, and finally dissolved. And even beyond that: members of the National Socialist Party and those belonging to the SA and SS were not only excluded from all public offices—they were not even allowed to take on employment as simple workers in an army company. Nonetheless, the National Socialists in Czechoslovakia were given long prison sentences on the basis of this false view. In reality, the SA and the SS of the National Socialist Party have evolved totally without aid, totally without financial support from the State, the Reich, or even less the Reichswehr; without any sort of military training and without any sort of military equipment, out of pure party political needs and in accordance with party political considerations. Their purpose was and is exclusively confined to the elimination of the Communist threat, and their training, which bears no connection to the Army, was designed solely for the purposes of propaganda and enlightenment, mass psychological effect, and the crushing of Communist terror.

They are institutions for instilling a true community spirit, overcoming former class differences, and alleviating economic want.



The Stahlhelm came into being in memory of the great age of the common experiences at the front, to nurture established traditions, maintain comradeship, and finally also to protect the German Volk from the Communist revolution which has been threatening the Volk since November 1918, a threat which admittedly cannot be fathomed by countries who have never had millions of organized Communists as we have and have not suffered at the hands of terror as Germany has. For the real objective of these national organizations is best characterized by the type of struggle in which they are actually engaged, and the toll this has taken. As a consequence of Communist slayings and acts of terror in the space of only a few years, the SA and SS suffered over 350 dead and about 40,000 injured. If today the attempt is being made in Geneva to add these organizations which exclusively serve domestic purposes to the Armed Forces figure, then one might as well count the fire brigades, the gymnastics clubs, the security corps, the rowing clubs, and other sports organizations as members of the Armed Forces, too.

However, when at the same time the trained annual contingents of the other armies of the world are not included, in contrast to these men totally lacking in military training; when one deliberately overlooks the armed reserves of the others while commencing to count the unarmed members of our political associations, we have before us a procedure against which I must lodge the sharpest protest! If the world wishes to destroy confidence in what is right and just, these are the best means of doing so.

On behalf of the German Volk and the German Government, I must make the following clear: Germany has disarmed. It has fulfilled the obligations imposed upon it in the Peace Treaty to an extent far beyond the limits of what can be deemed fair or even reasonable. Its army consists of 100,000 men. The strength and character of its police is internationally regulated.

The auxiliary police instituted in the days of the Revolution is exclusively political in character. In those critical days, it replaced the other part of the police which, at the time, the new regime suspected of being unstable. Now that the Revolution has been successfully carried through, this force is already being depleted and will be completely dissolved even before the year is over. Germany thus has a fully justified moral right to insist that the other powers also fulfil their obligations pursuant to the Treaty of Versailles. The equality of rights accorded to Germany in December has not yet become reality. Since France has repeatedly asserted that the safety of France must be given the same consideration as Germany's equality of rights, I would like to pose two questions in this regard: 1. So far, Germany has accepted all of the obligations in respect to security arising from the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, the Kellogg Pact, the Treaties of Arbitration, the Pact of Nonaggression, etc. What other concrete assurances are there which Germany could assume? 2. On the other hand, what security does Germany have? According to the information of the League of Nations, France alone has 3,046 aircraft in service while Belgium has 350, Poland 700, and Czechoslovakia 670. In addition, there are innumerable quantities of reserve aircraft, thousands of armoured vehicles, thousands of pieces of heavy artillery, and all of the technical means required to conduct warfare with chemical gases. Doesn't Germany have more reason, in view of its lack of defences and weapons, to demand security than the armed states united by alliances? Germany is nonetheless prepared at any time to assume further obligations to ensure international security if all other nations are willing to do so as well and Germany also benefits from this step. Germany would also be more than willing to disband its entire military establishment and destroy those few weapons still remaining at its disposal, were the bordering nations to do the same without exception. However, if the other States are not willing to comply with the disarmament provisions imposed upon them by the Peace Treaty of Versailles, then



Germany must, at the very least, insist upon its demand for equal treatment. The German Government sees in the British plan a possible basis for the answer to these questions. However, it must demand that it not be forced to destroy an existing military institution without being granted at least qualitatively equal rights. Germany must demand that any commutation of the military institution in Germany-an institution we do not want in Germany, but one which was forced upon us from abroad-is performed only to the extent of the actual disarmament performed concurrently by the other States.

In this connection, Germany is essentially willing to agree to a transitional period of five years to bring about its national security in the expectation that, subsequent thereto, Germany will be accorded genuine equality with the other States. Germany is also perfectly prepared to completely abandon offensive weapons if, within a certain period, the armed nations destroy their own offensive weapons in turn and the use of such weapons is banned by international convention. It is Germany's sole desire to maintain its independence and be in a position to protect its borders.

According to a statement made in February 1932 by the French Minister of War, a large portion of the coloured French troops are available for immediate use on the French mainland. He therefore has explicitly included them in the home forces.

Thus it is only fair to take the coloured forces into account as an integral part of the French Army in the disarmament conference as well. Although one refuses to do this, one nevertheless proposes counting associations and organizations as part of the German Army which serve purely educational and sporting purposes and are given no military training whatsoever. In the other countries, there is no question of these types of associations being counted as part of military strength. This is obviously a completely impossible procedure.

Germany would also be willing at any time, in the event that an objective international arms control board is created, to subject the associations in question to such control-given the same willingness on the part of the other States-in order to demonstrate to the whole world its wholly unmilitary character. Furthermore, the German Government will reject no ban on arms as being too drastic if it is likewise applied to the other States.

These demands do not mean rearmament, but rather a desire for the disarmament of the other States. On behalf of the German Government, I may once again welcome the farsighted and just plan of the Italian Head of State to create, by means of a special pact, close relations of confidence and cooperation between the four major European powers, Great Britain, France, Italy, and Germany. Mussolini's view that this would serve as a bridge to facilitate an understanding is a view with which the German Government agrees out of its most deeply seated convictions. It desires to oblige to the fullest possible extent if the other nations as well are inclined to genuinely overcome any difficulties which may stand in the way.

Thus the proposal made by the American President Roosevelt, of which I learned last night, deserves the warmest thanks of the German Government.

The Government is prepared to consent to this method for solving the international crisis, for it is of the opinion that, if the question of disarmament is not solved, permanent economic reconstruction is inconceivable. It is willing to make a selfless contribution to this task of restoring the political and economic state of the world to order. It is also, as I have stressed in the beginning, of the conviction that there can only be one great task in our time: securing peace in the world.



I feel obliged to state that the reason for today's armament in France or Poland can under no circumstances be the fear of these nations of a German invasion. For such a fear would only be justified by the existence of modern offensive weapons. But these modern offensive weapons are exactly the ones which Germany does not have: it has neither heavy artillery nor tanks nor bombers nor poisonous gases.

The only nation which has reason to fear an invasion is the German nation, which is not only barred from having offensive weapons, but even restricted in its right to possess defensive weapons and prohibited from erecting fortifications on its borders. Germany is prepared to renounce offensive weapons at any time if the rest of the world does the same. Germany is willing to join any solemn pact of non-aggression, for Germany's concern is not offensive warfare, but its own security.

Germany would welcome the opportunity suggested in President Roosevelt's proposal of incorporating the United States in European relations in the role of guarantor of peace. This proposal signifies a great consolation to all those who wish to seriously cooperate toward maintaining peace. Our one most fervent desire is to contribute toward permanently healing the wounds inflicted by the War and the Treaty of Versailles. And Germany will take no path other than that which is recognized by the treaties themselves as just. The German Government wishes to engage in peaceful discussions with the other nations on all difficult questions. It knows that, given any military action in Europe, even if it be completely successful, the losses thus incurred would bear no relation to the gains.

Under no circumstances, however, will the German Government and the German Volk allow themselves to be coerced into signing anything which would constitute a perpetuation of Germany's degradation. Any attempt to influence the Government and the Volk with threats will be to no avail. It is conceivable that, contrary to everything which is right and moral, Germany could be raped; it is, however, inconceivable and out of the question that such an act could be accorded legitimacy by means of our own signature.

The attempt has been made in newspaper articles and regrettable speeches to threaten Germany with sanctions, but a method as monstrous as this can only be the punishment for the fact that, by demanding disarmament, we are asking that the treaties be fulfilled. Such a measure could lead only to the ultimate moral and factual invalidation of the treaties themselves. But even in that case, Germany would never give up its peaceful demands. The political and economic consequences—the chaos which such an attempt would cause in Europe—would be the responsibility of those who resorted to such measures to fight a people which is doing no harm to the world.

Any such attempt, any attempt at doing violence to Germany by means of forming a simple majority against the unequivocal spirit of the treaties could only be dictated by the intention of excluding us from the conferences. But today the German Volk possesses enough character to refrain, in such an event, from forcing its cooperation upon the other nations; it would rather, albeit with a heavy heart, draw the only possible conclusions.

It would be difficult for us to remain a member of the League of Nations as a Volk subjected to constant degradation. The German Government and the German Volk are aware of the present crisis. For years, warnings have come from Germany to desist from the methods which have inevitably



produced this political and economic state of affairs. If the present course is held and the present methods are continued, there can be no doubt as to the final result.

Seeming political successes on the part of individual nations will be followed by all the more severe economic and hence political catastrophes affecting all. We regard it as our first and foremost task to prevent this.

No effective action has been undertaken to date. The rest of the world tells us that one did, in fact, harbour a certain amount of sympathy for the former Germany; now at least we have become acquainted with the consequences and effects of this "sympathy" in Germany and for Germany! Millions of lives destroyed, entire trades ruined, and an enormous army of unemployed-an inconsolable wretchedness, the extent and depth of which I would like to convey to the rest of the world today in a single figure: Since the day when this Treaty was signed, which was, as a work of peace, to be the foundation for a new and better age for all peoples, there have been 224,000 people in our German Volk who, moved almost exclusively by want and misery, have chosen to take their own lives-men and women, young and old alike! These incorruptible witnesses are an indictment against the spirit and fulfillment of a treaty, from the effects of which not only the rest of the world, but also millions of people in Germany once expected salvation and good fortune. May this also serve to make the other nations understand Germany's unshakable will and determination to finally put an end to an era of human aberration in order to find the way to an ultimate consensus of all on the basis of equal rights.

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Neues Europa at 06:30:00

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